



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

CRANKS AND CRAZES.

BY MRS. LYNN LINTON.

IMAGINATION is by far the strongest faculty of the human mind ; and the world which each man makes for himself is more real than the things of time and sense. Hence, society has never wanted for cranks to whom black is white and the pyramid rests on its apex ; and crazes, able to attract their thousands, have ever run like wild-fire through the land. We see this in the very beginnings of society, when man first endeavors to frame a theory of the universe and his relations with the unseen. In the Obi-man and the witch-finder of the savage ; in his elaborate system of taboo and his fear of, because his belief in, ghosts ; in his impressibility by dreams, and his idea that what is simply the automatic action of the brain is a real thing, an objective drama wherein his errant soul plays the part of audience ; in his religion and his beliefs—this faculty of the imagination with the primitive man is supreme : and, working upward from him, so do we find it everywhere, graduated according to education or ignorance, strength of mind or feebleness of wit.

To reason with a crank is to carry water in a sieve. He is incapable of reasoning on any subject whatever. He has “realized” this or that, and when he has once done this, though change, with its consequent sanity, may come, it is not very likely that it will. The kink in the brain which has produced this condition of thought is more likely to be permanent than transient ; and the crank with a theory, the crank with a faith unprovable by evidence, or one with personal ambition, a personal grievance or a “mission” self-evolved, is to all intents a lunatic and may be a dangerous one into the bargain. History shows this, from Ravallac’s time and before ; and more than the one crime of burning the Temple of Diana has been committed by madmen as

crazily desirous of perpetuating their names as was ever that infamous Ephesian. Not so many years ago, indeed, a young fellow committed a barbarous murder, with the avowed desire of "making all England ring with his name"—this being his idea of glory and renown. Perfect mental sanity is just the hardest thing to find among men. Genius, wit, imagination, and all the intellectual faculties cultivated to the highest point, these we can find without the need of a lanthorn; but that exact mental equilibrium, that flawless self-possession, which is mental sanity—here we are like those who seek for a buried treasure, which exists, but where?

What is true of individual cranks, is true of more widely dispersed crazes. Of these each age has its special portion. Now it is the Crusades and now the discovery of the North Pole. Now it is the end of the world as prophesied by Solomon Eagle and Dr. Cumming, and now it is the Millennium which is to come with to-morrow's sun, when no eagle shall pounce on any leveret, no owl shall go a-mousing o' nights, no man shall die, and no tillage shall be necessary for the full vintage of the rich harvest. This belief in the Millennium has long been a favorite craze with many. It is on a par with that reappearance of popular leaders and heroes, which consoled the desolate adherents when death claimed his tribute and the Great Charles, like Frederic Barbarossa and our own King Arthur, *inter alia*, died the death of ordinary men to be resuscitated as the elect, when their night had passed and their day had dawned again. How those who believe in this blissful state of universal peace and joy and deathlessness and the union of lions and lambs can reconcile this dream with the stern facts of life as we know it; how they can believe that this shifting phantasmagoria, where all old things are being forever ground up into new, can become as stable and unchanging as a Heaven of brass and an earth of iron; how they can believe in the universal suspension of all activities, all changes—seems to those not influenced by that craze one of the most extraordinary delusions of Hope which Imagination ever wrought. But many do so believe it—in the rough—as a sketch. They do not care to go into details and to work out for themselves the problem of this universal suspension—this unchanging stability of condition. They leave that to the Great God who is to arrange it all, and have no doubt but that He can so order all things as to make that life which is

essentially fluid, shifting, and incessantly reproductive, as fixed and unchangeable as a crystal imbedded in a rock. That is, Law has no meaning for them, experience no lessons, and the miraculous is the only certainty.

Theosophy and all the phenomena of spiritualism follow on the same line. Their very impossibility feeds the craze; and *credo quia impossibile* is the motto of the sect. That a set of unknown men living in the obscure valleys of Thibet and calling themselves Mahatmas, should be able to set all the laws of nature at defiance has a fascination for some which they are unable to resist. These, the Masters of Nature, are, according to some, the makers of storms and tempests and the creators of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. They are the managers who pull the strings, and the Forces of Nature are the marionettes they make dance as they list. They have conquered the difficulty of solids passing through solids, and have annihilated time and space. Their letters written on purchasable Indian writing paper—whereof “Madame” had a large store—can fly unseen from Thibet to London where they fall from the ceiling into the lap of the high priestess. They themselves appear to their believers in the gloaming, and weave turbans of nice fine Manchester cloth out of the viewless air. They live to a fabulous old age, retaining their comparative youth and good looks to the last, so that a sage of ninety looks like a handsome man of forty, and one at sixty has the flesh and skin of twenty-five or thirty. To this add the doctrine of re-incarnation, which, as with the elephant that stands on the tortoise, removes by one stage the mystery of a living soul or ever the body took shape for its habitation.

Add, too, the belief that a man can evolve out of his own body a materialized spirit which, first appearing as a nebulous mass, gradually takes the form and substance of a concrete human being who walks about the room, talks in English, sometimes of a doubtful kind, takes your hand in his—and his is as warm and substantial as your own—and finally sinks to the floor and dissolves once more into nebulosity and nothingness.

These are among the crazes which sane people believe—these, with colloquies and revelations from ghosts, and communications from spirits who can give you a world of unprovable information, but who were baffled by the mystery of Jack the Ripper, and, able to see what is passing in a private house in India, are unable

to read the number of that bank-note within a securely fastened envelope.

The craze of spiritualism, in its last developments, is perhaps one of the most astounding instances of human superstition known to us. The auguries drawn from the sacred chickens and the flight of birds, dear to the Romans, were strange enough; but that sane, wise, learned men should suffer themselves to be tricked by a few artful ventriloquists and one-trick conjurers is something that strikes those who do not share this belief as the only marvel of the thing.

This proneness to accept superstition and fancies for proved facts is as old as human nature, and has been one of the most fruitful of all the harvests reaped by the astute and unscrupulous in the garths of the credulous and imaginative. It is not a thing of to-day, nor of England only. It is older than the Eleusinian mysteries, than the serpent rods of the Egyptian sorcerers, than the advent of Oannes or the peopling of the world by dragon's teeth. It is a craze as persistent as thought, and will ever be, while we are ignorant of our true relations with the universe. For it is the outcome of spiritual desire, the embodied expression of that stretching out of our hands towards the Unknown—of that fruitless endeavor to grasp the truth which eludes us, that makes half the charm and half the pathos of thought. It is a craze all the same, and when carried to excess it is as dangerous as it is humiliating and fallacious.

Certain modern crazes fall far below this in what may be called the poetry of delusion—the dignity of hallucination—though one, at least, has an aura of nobleness, which, in some instances, redeems it from rank mischief. We mean the modern craze for missionary work in unlikely and unsympathetic countries, where the lives of the missionaries are in danger, where the converts they make are, for the most part, unredeemed scoundrels, and where the civilization of the people is older and more compact than our own, better suited to the needs of the people, and of the kind wherein morality, customs and religion are all as closely and inextricably intertwined as the fibres of a plant. Separate them and you destroy the whole structure. But this argument has no effect on those whose craze it is to carry the Bible into the far East and so turn bad Buddhists into worse Christians. Nor does it give them pause that by their rash action—self-sacrificing if

you will, but none the less impertinent and meddlesome—they may create a war among the nations wherein thousands on thousands will be sacrificed. The missionary craze has no respect for ultimates, beyond that doubtful gain of inducing a Chinaman to repeat the Apostles' creed instead of chin-chinning Joss—of substituting for the Brahmin's belief in the genesis of man from the body of the god, the story of the clay figure and the abstracted rib. For all the misery and murder that may follow his tampering with established faiths—for all the unsatisfactory nature of the conversions he may make—he goes on in the old path, and shuts his eyes to the evil he so diligently effects. He is impelled by the craze of interference, and reason is as a dumb dog while he careers over the ground mounted on the hippogriff of an impracticable and a mischievous enthusiasm.

The same kind of craze makes people take up any extraneous cause, whether they understand it in its entirety or not. The love of acting Providence is so great with some! Now we must trounce the Unspeakable Turk for his dealings with his Christian subjects; and not the biggest duck that flies about the world of rumor is too big for us to swallow. We do not stop to inquire before we condemn, and while the sager and cooler among us would hesitate before taking action on an *ex parte* statement, not sifted to the bottom, the cranks for the sake of humanity, and those who are crazy to be as a potent Providence sailing over the seas in ironclads, insist on an instant and unanswerable demonstration—on the thrusting of the hand, wrist-deep, into the pie with which they and we have no concern. That valuable doctrine of letting alone has no meaning for those cranks eager to mind everybody's business but their own; and that significant clock will certainly never be given to the English-speaking peoples while they are so intent on playing Providence and following in the footsteps of Don Quixote.

Going still a step lower, what queer crazes take possession of the public taste! Take cycling as an example. Walking, riding, skating, and dancing we can understand as fit exercise for the vigorous and young; driving is precious to the indolent and the delicate; but cycling seems to be such a doubtful kind of amusement—such a queer cross between the treadmill and the tight-rope—demanding such a constant strain of attention to keep your balance, with such a monotonous and restricted action

of the limbs as to render it a work of penance rather than of pleasure. To be sure there is the enjoyment of rapid motion through the air ; and there must be something in the very lightness of the machine, the very exiguity of seat and tackle which creates a charm. But to the uninitiated the craze which has swept over England seems inconceivable ; and, as a substitute for the horse and the carriage and one's own two feet, these uninitiated place the bicycle nowhere. It is invaluable as a cheap mode of locomotion for those who cannot afford to keep a horse and who want to go further afield than their own walking powers will take them ; but for those who can afford horses and carriages and Pullman cars and all the rest of it, a wheeled treadmill seems but a queer kind of vehicle, and its popularity counts among the things which no fellow can understand. And those crazy cycling tours around the world, how mad they are ! about as mad as the champion globe-trotter who flies through every country at express speed ; as the man who undertakes to wheel his wife in a wheel barrow from the Land's End to John o'Groat's ; as the man who goes over Niagara Falls in a barrel ; or he who crosses the Atlantic in an open boat with only a dog for his mate.

A craze, too, when it broke out, was the sudden *engouement* for coster songs, which nothing but the genius of Chevalier excused, and which, without him, were detestable. A craze that had its graver side was the effeminate young man's passion for bric-à-brac, the worship of sunflowers and lilies, and the desire to live up to his blue china. He was a weak and puny creature when he began ; when he culminated in the Yellow Book and certain illustrations he was something worse. That, too, is a craze like any other ; and the sudden, the un-English apotheosis of licentious literature and art counts as one of the most extraordinary, as well as regrettable, outbreaks of modern times. And as everything has its shadow, and the swing of the pendulum to the left is in exact ratio with that of its swing to the right, the Yellow Book and all its congeners have fostered, if not produced, the corresponding craze of Prurient Prudery, when again that haunting desire to put their fingers, unasked, into pies not belonging to them, makes intermeddling cranks of honest citizens, and brings virtue into disrepute because of the unloveliness of its advocates.

Cheapness comes into the category of modern crazes—cheap things however produced—cheapness got by the sweating of the

hands and the poorness of the material, by tears and starvation here, by disappointment and untrustworthiness there. But it is a craze, and we have to go through with it. Its offset and its origin—at once cause and effect—is the craze for those huge emporia which eat up the small private tradesman in the locality even as the Lamb of the Steppes eats up all the herbage round its fatal growth. It would be interesting, instructive, and tragical, to learn how many bankrupts and how many broken-hearts and ruined lives have been made by these huge emporia—how many “hands” have been driven to suicide or to drink by sheer despair of ill-paid work and indecent poverty joined with crushing toil—how many honest workmen have been thrown on the rates because of unemployment, while Germany, France and Switzerland send their cheaper products by the shipload, and the public greedily buys for a shilling an inferior thing made abroad for which, if English, they would pay perhaps fourteen pence. The odd twopence goes in the way of rates and charities; but this is a calculation beyond the power of the craze-afflicted, and the round of wrong goes on without a break in its vicious circle.

A craze that has got to bear its ultimate fruit is our modern high-class education for the working classes, those who have to gain their bread by their handiwork and to whom, therefore, specialized and technical instruction would seem to be more necessary than generalized and purely intellectual. A lad destined to be a carpenter would surely do better if taught to handle his tools betimes and instructed in the mysteries of rabbeting and mortising, of dovetailing and planing, rather than in the details of osteology or the curiosities of botany. And a girl who has to be a cook might be taught how to boil potatoes, with greater advantage to her future, than how to play the piano or to sing in part songs. On this craze, however, it becomes us to keep a discreet silence. It is idle to prophesy, and until we see the results we cannot be sure that the thing is for good or evil.

It may raise the whole nation into a higher level, keeping the relative gradations intact; or it may throw the whole thing out of gear and into confusion, and produce a time of social chaos, destructive of all growth and good. *Quien sabe?* On the knees of the gods lies the answer to the question, and there we must leave it till Time and the Future unfold it.

E. LYNN LINTON.